

# REVIEWS OF BOOKS

## POPULATION

**Chandrasekhar, S.** *Census and Statistics in India.* 1948. Annamalai University, Annamalaiagar, India. Pp. 32. Price 1 rupee.

DR. CHANDRASEKHAR, we are told on the second page of this pamphlet, is professor and head of the Department of Economics in Annamalai University; he received his education from the Madras Presidency College, University of Madras, and from Columbia and New York Universities; he also taught Indian economics in America in the years 1944-46. Recently Dr. Chandrasekhar has been a member of the staff of Unesco.

The pamphlet here reviewed is a summary of two lectures delivered in January 1948 before the Economics Honours Association of Annamalai University; it deals first with censuses and next with vital registration. The first of India's decennial censuses was held in 1872. The machinery of enumeration has changed little, we are told, since that date; but in the latest census—that of 1941—the schedule comprised twenty-two questions, some of which were new. The new questions dealt with unemployment, means of livelihood and such aspects of fertility as the age of the citizen at marriage, the age of the mother at the birth of her first child, the number of births and the number of surviving children.

Dr. Chandrasekhar describes the obstacles which confront the enumerators: these comprise transport difficulties, illiteracy, the fact that all but the highest officials in the census hierarchy are unremunerated, the disobedience movements, the caste system, superstitions that enumeration brings back bad luck, and the belief that the inclusion of questions on fertility "arose out of the desire of the authorities to vilify the Indian people." The author does not mention the communal disturbances.

Despite these obstacles the Indian census operations were, in the author's opinion, the

largest, quickest and cheapest in the world. But not the best.

Turning from the census to vital registration, we find a less impressive picture. The duties of ascertaining the number of births and deaths in rural areas ultimately fall, as do those of census enumeration, on the village munsif or chowdika or watchman or headman, while in the towns they fall on the municipal sanitary departments. Births present greater difficulties than deaths; it has been suggested that during the period 1921-31 there was in Calcutta approximately 21 per cent. under-registration of births. Hence inter-censal estimates of the population nearly always fall short of the real figures. There is much variation in the amount of error. "According to the Chief Census Commissioner, the error in vital statistics for India as a whole in 1930 was about 20 per cent. While the error in Madras was a half per cent., in Mysore it was 50 per cent. and in Assam it was 60 per cent." These wide differences are not easy to explain. There are difficulties in accurately recording the ages of the population. Birth certificates are not demanded by the people nor are they easily supplied. "The census department has devised measures to assist friendly but ignorant citizens to discover their own age. During the census period each province prepares a calendar going back about eighty years, with important landmarks that linger in the memory of the public." Well-known incidents like the first world war, the death of Queen Victoria, or the Moplah Rebellion, if remembered, give a clue to the individual's age.

To the average British reader, a useful pamphlet will seem marred by the stridently critical note sounded throughout towards the British administration. Dr. Chandrasekhar was nurtured in India, went to America and returned to India. Criticisms such as his doubtless went down well in many parts of the U.S.A.; and they may have been almost *de rigueur* in a lecture to an Indian University audience. The British Government is blamed

because the Indian census is not as accurate as the American ; because so little money is spent on the census ; because there is no "widespread network of railways or canals or express highways connecting the entire rural India, thanks to the short-sighted policy of our past Government" ; because we committed India to a European war (was there not a Japanese war, and did not the Japanese threaten India ?) ; because we officially tried to perpetuate social evils in India (were there not some we tried to abolish ?) ; because the administration seems to think "that all statistics are for governmental and interdepartmental uses and not for public consumption." "Such an assumption can be true," writes Dr. Chandrasekhar, "only when the government is not of the people." (Only ? Is the bureaucratic mentality thus delimited ?)

Let us be thankful that India now has her independence, so that men like Dr. Chandrasekhar will have power to introduce into their country, without these many frustrations, the changes for which they so clearly see the need. Let us wish them well in their efforts to translate many critical words into a few constructive deeds.

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**Family Planning Association (Editors).**

*Proceedings of the International Congress on Population and World Resources in Relation to the Family.* London, 1948. H. K. Lewis. Pp. xviii + 246. Price 10s. 6d.

IN view of criticisms that must be made, it is fair to state at once that this volume is essential reading for everyone concerned with problems of world population. In its pages are collected the papers given before the Cheltenham Congress by leading authorities on population—a term used here in its widest sense, to cover not only demographic but medical, moral and social problems concerned in the control of mankind's numbers and in the migratory movements of peoples—as well as contributions made to the various discussions by delegates who attended from every quarter of the globe.

The authorities were drawn mainly, though not exclusively, from Europe and the United States, and the list of their names reads like a Who's Who of both academic demography and family planning. Admittedly some notable names are missing, but this comment could equally be made about any international congress on any subject, anywhere. The fact remains that in these proceedings the reader will find a representative selection of views from those best qualified, by wealth of knowledge and experience, to offer them ; and not only views, but solid information, much of it accessible only with great difficulty, if at all, elsewhere. Any more detailed survey of the contents would be virtually co-extensive with the whole field of demographic studies—that is to say, with the diversity of problems that arise from the complex relation between world resources and the reproduction, distribution and qualities of mankind ; but such an enumeration would occupy the whole of the space allotted for this review, and no one would be any the better for reading it.

For the authors of the papers, then, and for those who took part in the discussions, there can be nothing but the highest praise. But the same cannot be said for the manner in which their contributions are presented to the reader. A careful survey of the papers reveals scarcely a sign of editorial intervention. They appear to be published exactly as they were delivered ; or if, as is claimed in the introduction, they have been edited for Press, the blue pencil has strayed into the wrong places ; and it is only too clear that the later speakers, whose remarks are reported in summary form and in indirect narration, were given no opportunity for revising their material for Press. Such a procedure is fair to neither authors nor readers. Many of those who read prepared papers were experienced lecturers, sensitive to the rhythms and idiom of the spoken word. If they had been given an opportunity to revise their material for publication it is doubtful if they would have made many changes—probably little more than a word here or a construction there. But they would have turned the spoken into the written